

Occupational Identities as Barriers to Traditional Forms of Representation: A Study of Video Game Workers

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Games of Empire

Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009

- Video games are emblematic of global hyper-capitalism
 - Born from and reinforcing the military-industrial complex
 - Individualism, competition, free-market models
 - Gender and racial oppression, obedience to hierarchies and structure
- Simulate identities as:
 - Citizen-soldiers
 - Free-agent workers
 - Cyborg adventurers
 - Corporate criminals
- Train workers for the 'new age'
 - Blurred work and play
 - Melding of production and consumption
 - Experts in networked communication and digital technologies

Occupational Community

Salaman, 1971; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984

- High sense of involvement and absorption with the work
- Draw identities from their work
- Blurring of work and leisure, primarily work-related social relationships
- Sense of the community beyond single organizations – community set by the members
- Often an aspect of marginality – also linked to use of specialized language and customs
- Common set of values, norms and perspectives

Industry/Org Culture

- Secrecy
- Mantra of innovation within a system of strong risk aversion and conservatism
- Downloading of risk to smaller players (contract studios, global outsourcing, unpaid fans)
- Extreme cost-consciousness
- Hierarchical divisions of labour and production processes
- Brand loyalty – games, studios and industry
- Reinforce individual drive and motivation to produce
- Strive for perfection and glory with each game

Industry Socialization

- Capitalist norms, values and ideologies that are represented in video games are reinforced through the occupational community of the video game workers and through the organizational cultures of the workplaces and industry as a whole

Why Study Game Industry?

- Share qualities of other high-tech workers and emerging professionals...

BUT

- Clearest example of how occupational community and org culture shape perceptions towards labour process, working conditions, workplace citizenship, representation, etc.
- Explain existing tolerance of some of the realities of the industry and recent developments within the industry

Handout One: Blog Exchange

- Example of how norms of occupational community are developed and passed on
- In this exchange:
 - Love of games is central
 - Importance of the work they do
 - How making games is a unique line of work
 - The act of making the games is central and other workplace issues are secondary
 - Acceptance of the labour process and norms of the industry

Handout Two: Job Ads

- **Work as play** (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, De Peuter, 2004)
and capitalist ideology
 - Innovation, creativity, work hard, play hard, be a part of something big and great
 - Signal to workers about how to behave
 - Show that workers should be devoted, passionate, competitive and try to achieve glory through their work

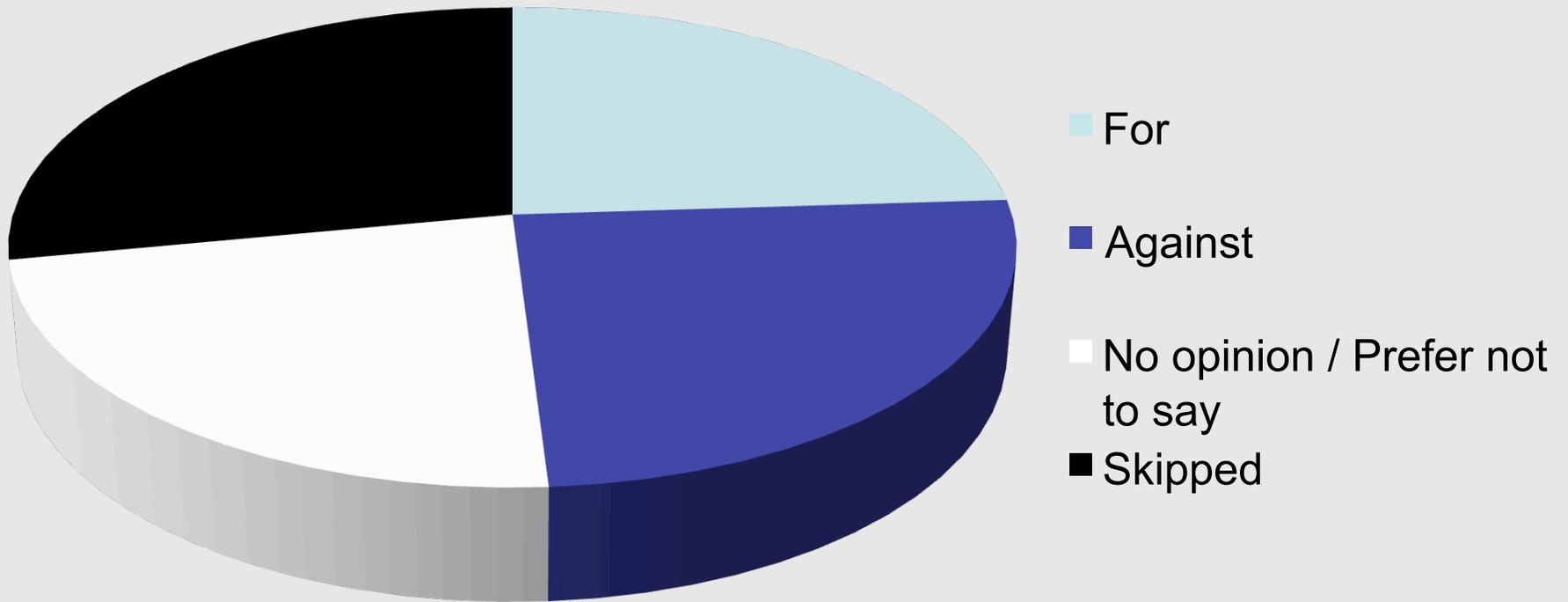
So What?

- Occupational community and organizational culture support the industry norms that lead to self-exploitation
- **But**, they also bind workers very closely together across organizational boundaries
- **And**, don't forget the hacker, counter-culture, hero mentality...
- Fertile ground for collective action should the right triggers become a rallying cry...

Signs of Resistance

- EA Spouse Story
 - Grassroots mobilization following a blog about unpaid overtime at industry giant Electronic Arts
- International Game Developers Association
 - Industry advisory and networking group...plus?
 - Grievance system, health insurance, training, Quality of Life movement...
- Unionization?

If Union Vote Happened Today...





Thank you



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